

Crested Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*, a new species for Egypt and the African continent

Sherif and Mindy Baba El Din

In the late morning of 9 May 1996 we were watching hundreds of migrating raptors descending to drink at Bir El Ambagi, 7 km west of Quseir in the Eastern Desert. One bird, however, attracted our attention because of its bold, broadly banded, black and white tail and its relatively large size. Being aware of the recent occurrence of the Crested Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus* in the Middle East (United Arab Emirates, Israel and Saudi Arabia), and also the key identification features of *ptilorhynchus* as reviewed in recent literature², we immediately recognised the bird to be this species. The sighting represents the first record for Egypt and Africa and the second record for the Western Palearctic. The Crested Honey Buzzard was ascending with a mixed group, mostly Buzzards *Buteo buteo*, but also some Honey Buzzards *P. apivorus* and eagles, apparently after it had stopped to drink. From an altitude of about 70–80 m the bird rapidly gained height and vanished within about five minutes, joining a stream of birds moving in a northerly direction over the mountains.

Description

Size: larger than the adjacent Honey Buzzards and Buzzards.

Wings: broader than those of Honey Buzzard.

Underparts: body and underwing coverts buff with some faint dark barring. The rest of the underwing was whitish with barring across the flight feathers and a prominent dark trailing edge to the wing. No obvious carpal patch was noted.

Upperparts: briefly seen from a distance, the upperparts appeared greyish.

Head and Neck: the head was similar to the Honey Buzzard, but differed in possessing an incomplete, but very well-marked, dark brown gular gorget enclosing a pale buff throat.

Tail: shorter than Honey Buzzard. Pattern made up of three broad bands of equal width, two black (basal and terminal) and one white in the middle.

According to Forsman² the distinctive tail pattern and prominent dark trailing edge to the wing are characteristic of adult males of *P. ptilorhynchus*.

Crested Honey Buzzard is an Asiatic species breeding from far eastern Russia to Japan. It was previously regarded as conspecific with Honey Buzzard, but is now considered a separate species. The race *orientalis* is the most migratory form and is widely distributed in

northern Asia, breeding as far east as southern Siberia. Birds of this form have been found in the autumn migrating through East Kazakhstan with Honey Buzzards, 2,000 km west of their regular breeding grounds². The Egyptian record is most likely *P. p. orientalis*, the race recorded elsewhere in the Middle East.

The first record of the species in the Middle East was an adult male at Ras al Khaimah in the United Arab Emirates on 16 December 1992². Subsequently an adult male was photographed on 14 May 1994 in Eilat, Israel, migrating north with Honey Buzzards along the mountains near the border with Egypt. This constituted the first record for the Western Palearctic³. At Raydah in southwestern Saudi Arabia there were two juveniles on 11 October 1994¹. These and the other records outside its normal range indicate that the species has a tendency to vagrancy.

The Egyptian sighting of Crested Honey Buzzard further confirms Forsman's conclusion that individuals of this species might regularly join flocks of Honey Buzzards wintering in Africa. Egypt is situated on the main migration routes of populations of Honey Buzzard wintering in central and southern Africa and breeding in eastern Europe and northwestern Asia. In the spring the peak passage through Egypt is in May when hundreds of thousands of Honey Buzzards travel from their winter quarters in Africa northward along the mountains of the Eastern Desert along the coast of the Red Sea. Most birds cross the Gulf of Suez, then travel north through southern Sinai and the Arava Valley (Eilat), while some continue north through Suez across northern Sinai.

We concur with Forsman's recommendations that this species should be looked for on the major flyways in Africa and the Middle East. Forsman should be credited for clarifying the identification marks of this species which might otherwise have been overlooked.

References

1. Anonymous 1995. Western Palearctic reports. *Dutch Birding* 17: 76 and 119.
2. Forsman, D. 1994. Field identification of the Crested Honey Buzzard. *Birding World* 7: 396–403.
3. Shirihai, H. 1994. The Crested Honey Buzzard in Israel — a new Western Palearctic bird. *Birding World* 7: 404–406.

Sherif and Mindy Baba El Din, 4 Ismail El Mazni St. Apt. 8, Heliopolis, Cairo, Egypt.